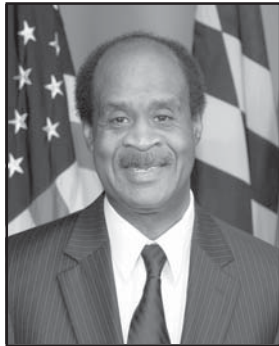




Isiah Leggett
County Executive

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

A Message from County Executive Isiah Leggett to Parents of Children in the Montgomery County Schools



In March, I released my recommended Operating Budget for Montgomery County government and County agencies – including the Montgomery County Public Schools — for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

Montgomery County rightfully prides itself on the investments we make year in and year out to light the lamp of learning in our schools, to help folks move around the County more efficiently, to protect County families and their properties, to be responsible stewards of our environment, to ensure a vital community where men and women can earn a living or grow a business, and to help the most needy and most vulnerable in our midst.

The good news is that Montgomery County is a place where all of this continues to take place. But the bad news is that County government has been living beyond its means. Given the weakness in the housing market and in the national economy – as well as the implications of the State budget crisis on the County — we have a very difficult year ahead in matching our resources and our needs. But our problems do not stop with a single year. We have a structural deficit that will only grow worse unless we change course – and do it now.

Many of the limited options available to the County to address prior budget shortfalls are no longer available. For example, the County income tax is at the legal limit of 3.2 percent. County taxes on energy and telephone services have been increased substantially over the past half dozen years, and County resident's energy costs are at an all-time high. The limited revenue options, combined with the sheer size of the shortfall, make the difficulties we face this year unprecedented in magnitude. But despite these difficulties, I have continued to make funds for MCPS my top priority by shifting as much of the burden for solutions away from MCPS.

Facing a \$400 million shortfall, I made substantial reductions in the current fiscal year budget, instituted a hiring freeze, and proposed reducing 225 positions in County government.

In the six-year Capital Budget I submitted in January, I increased MCPS funding by 17 percent even though the overall budget increase was 1 percent for County government and other outside County agencies. My recommended 1 percent increase contrasts sharply with an average increase for all agencies of 25 percent in each of the previous two capital budget cycles. I substantially reduced all other County capital spending to meet our school construction needs.

In the Operating Budget, I have recommended to the Council, an increase in County government spending of just 1.6 percent in the tax-supported budget, down from a 14 percent increase the year before I took office and 7 percent last year in my first budget as County Executive.

Overall, the County's tax-supported budget increases just 3.2 percent—the smallest increase in a dozen years. Under my recommendation, MCPS will receive two-thirds of the total increase in the County's budget.

I am recommending an increase in property taxes of \$138 million – an increase that will see the median County house assessed at \$343,000 pay 6.2 percent more – a \$138 increase. A home assessed at \$500,000 would pay \$383 more - an 11 percent increase.

My recommended budget provides MCPS with a 4 percent increase – or \$75 million — over last year's budget. That's nearly 98 percent of the Board of Education's request. This supports an anticipated student body of 137,763 down from a high of 139,387 in FY06. Per pupil spending increases to \$14,954. I strongly believe it is important to provide MCPS with the resources it needs to excel in its vital mission to properly educate our children and I am fully committed to that outcome.

Because I so strongly believe in the success of its mission,, I sought to protect funding for education above all else. As a grandfather with two children in a MCPS elementary school, I know how important education is to the future of our county.

The hard truth is that we all have to do more with less – and that includes MCPS. I believe MCPS can, and will, work creatively to minimize impacts on the most critical educational programs.

I will work closely with the County Council and the Board of Education to help our County – and especially our schools – weather the difficult challenges we are facing, and in all likelihood, will continue to face in the near term.

Thank you for your strong commitment to maintaining and improving our excellent school system.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Isiah Leggett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Isiah" and last name "Leggett" clearly distinguishable.

Isiah Leggett
County Executive